

Shade #4

DC Comics, July 1997

by Robinson & Zelli

Another fine Hal's A/Grundy scan





FROM THE PAGES OF **STARMAN**
THE

SHADE

4

\$2.25 US
\$3.25 CAN
JUL 97

JAMES
ROBINSON
MICHAEL
ZULLI

HARVEST'S END



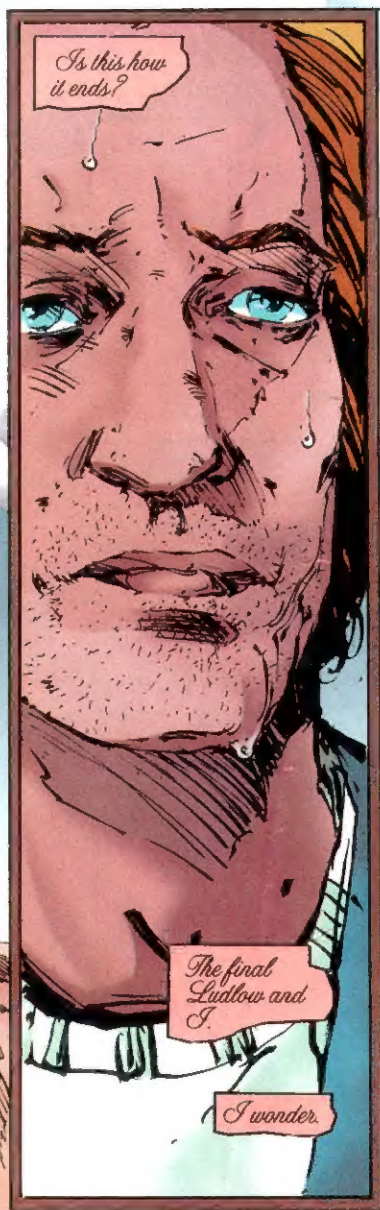
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*Is this how
it ends?*

*The final
Ludlow and
I.*

I wonder.

*I'm shivering,
but it can't be
from fear.*

*How could
I fear this
man?*



*I will go
on from this.
I know that.*

*I fear because
I want him to
go on too.*

WELL...

Shade: Finale

1997 Craig

writer
James Robinson

artist
Michael Zulli

colorist
Pat Garrahy

letterer

Chris Eliopoulos

editor

Chuck Kim

—HERE
WE ARE.



This began with a letter.

My address is not common knowledge so the correspondence had traveled far on a weaving tack. It had been mailed to Jay Garrick.

Who had mailed it on to Ted Knight.

Who had given it to his son Jack.

Jack had sat on the letter for some time while he battled the Royal Flush Gang, and then enjoyed a manic week of partying.

Finally he remembered and gave it to me. (Crumpled and stained with I don't want to think what.)

Dear Sir.

I'm not much of a writer so I'll be brief. My husband is Craig Ludlow. One of those who hate you. Only he doesn't. He's a good man, a farmer and a father. He has no ill-will towards you. I knew about the old hate with you but figured it would die with Craig, him not caring, and being the last of the English Ludlows you encountered long ago.

But then his brother Gary turned up. We thought he was dead. He was no good and always in trouble. Word had it he'd died in a knife fight in Denver.

Now he's reappeared, revealing that he'd faked his own death to avoid some men he owed money to.

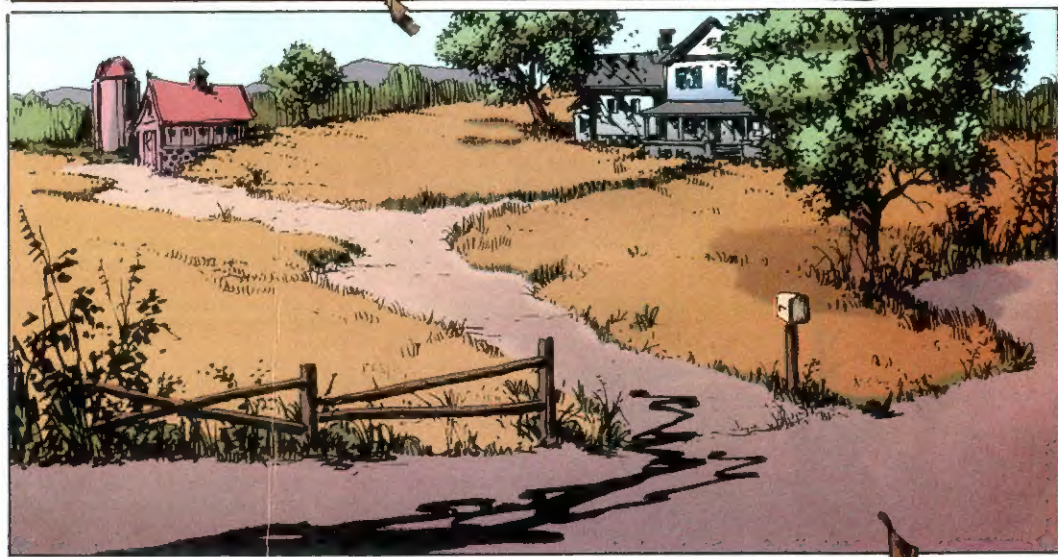
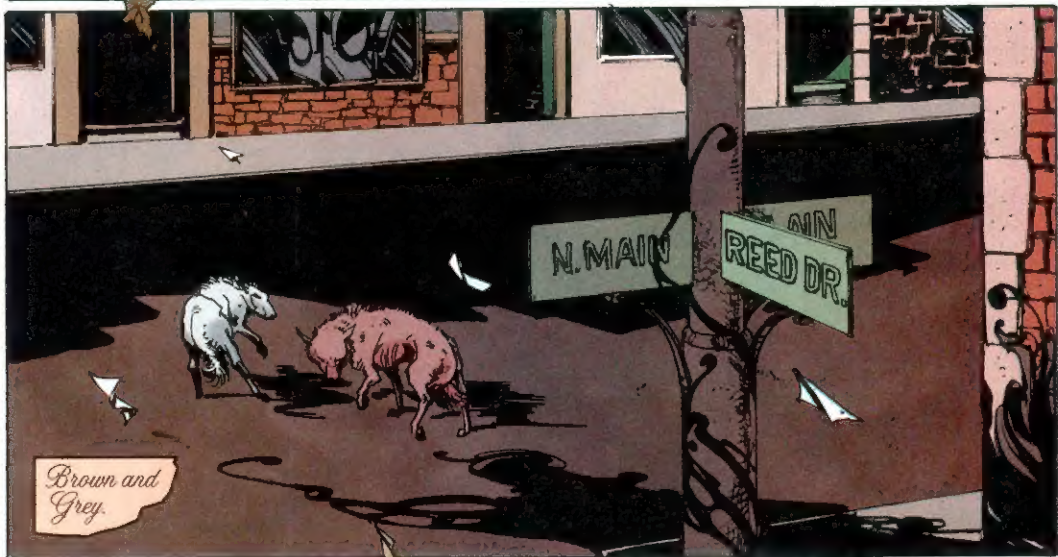
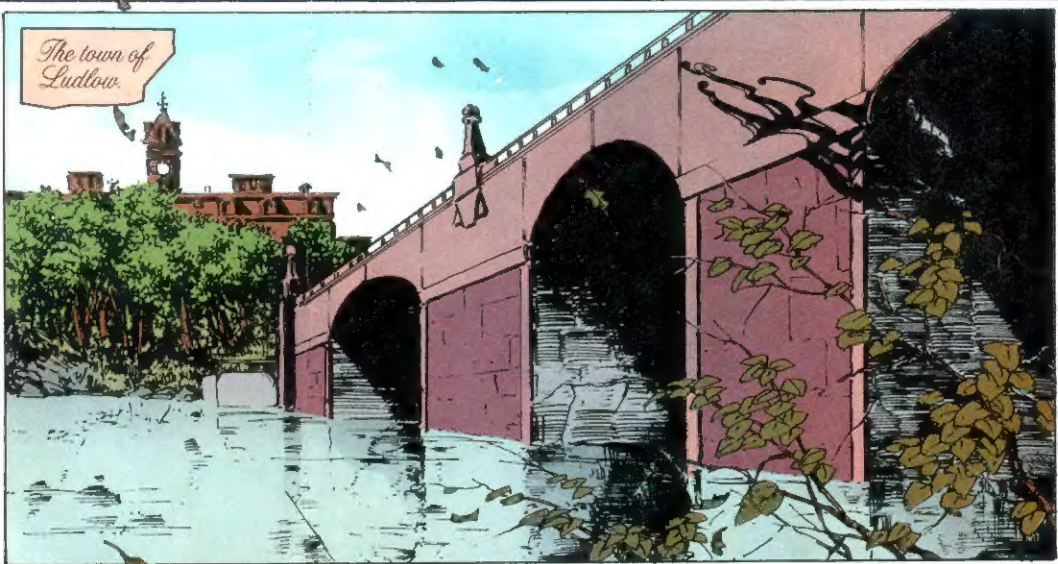
Yes, he's back and his Ludlow hate came with him. He wants to kill you. My husband is smart and gentle. Yet when he's with Gary he changes. The flicker of Ludlow craziness when your name comes up. I've begun to see it on his face.

I take a risk by writing to you, but I hope that by you coming to us, before they can formulate some scheme that will get them both killed, you might reason some sense into my husband's head.

We live in the town of Ludlow. This by coincidence more than design.

My address and that of my brother-in-law, Gary, are both below. I await your arrival with anticipation.

Yours,
Blair Ludlow







*The look in his eyes.
Full of hate. Fierce with
it. Yet he had no plan.
No power or skill. No
armed force. No
weaponry.*

*Just his name
and his hate.*

*And that look in
his eyes was the
assured knowledge
he was going to die.*

*His words... "it's
my time"... were not
referring to his time
to fight me. It was
his time to die by my
hand.*

*And he was
right.*





MRS. LUDLOW.



YOU'RE THE SHADE? YOU LOOK LIKE YOU ARE.

OH, I AM. BLACK CLOTHING. SMOCKED GLASS. SPECTACLES. ALL THE TRAPPINGS.

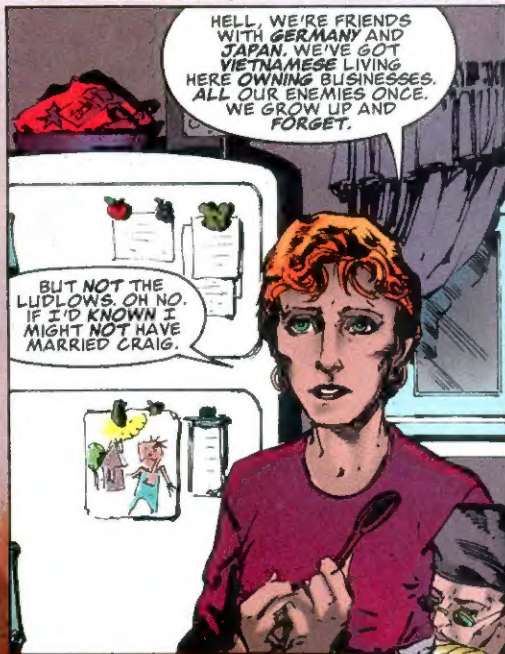


YOU TOOK A RISK SUMMONING ME HERE.

FOR THE FUTURE. FOR OUR BOY. I DON'T WANT YOU KILLING HIM WHEN HE'S GROWN. I DON'T WANT YOU KILLING HIS DADDY, EITHER.

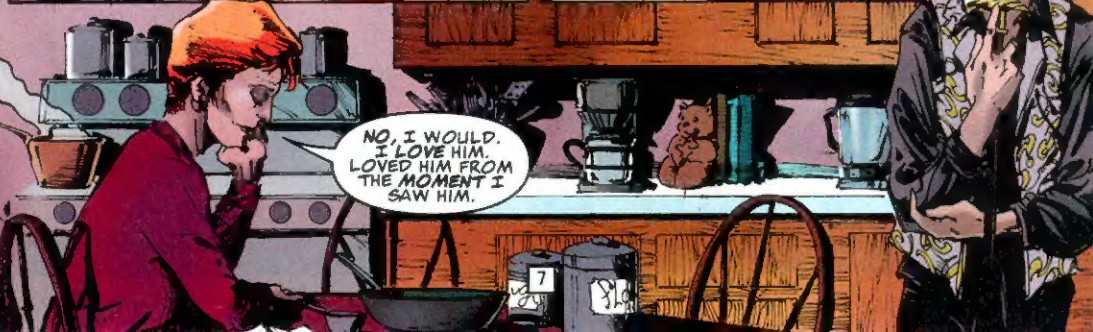


I JUST WANTED YOU TO TALK TO MY BROTHER-IN-LAW GARY. I WANT YOU TO REASON WITH HIM. TELL HIM THIS FELD IS CRAZY. SOMETHING A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO IN A LAND ACROSS THE SEA.



HELL, WE'RE FRIENDS WITH GERMANY AND JAPAN. WE'VE GOT VIETNAMESE LIVING HERE OWNING BUSINESSES. ALL OUR ENEMIES ONCE. WE GROW UP AND FORGET.

BUT NOT THE LUDLOWS. OH NO. IF I'D KNOWN I MIGHT NOT HAVE MARRIED CRAIG.

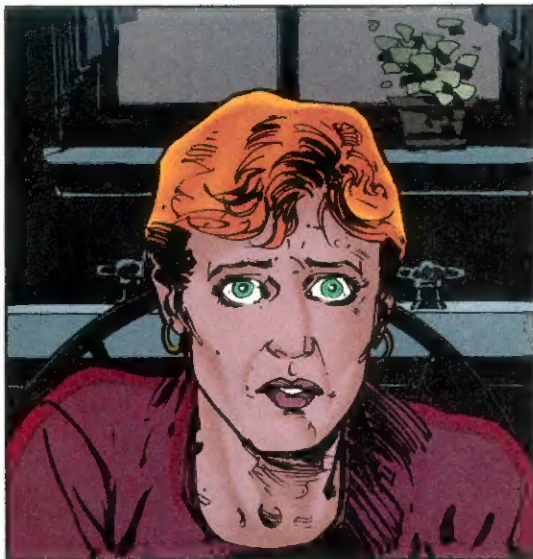


NO, I WOULD. I LOVE HIM. LOVED HIM FROM THE MOMENT I SAW HIM.



ANYWAY,
IF YOU COULD
JUST SPEAK
TO GARY.

I'M AFRAID
I ALREADY DID.
THE MEETING DID
NOT GO WELL.



NOW I
MUST SPEAK
TO YOUR
HUSBAND.

TO
REASON WITH
HIM?

IF HE'LL
LISTEN.

AND IF HE
DOESN'T?



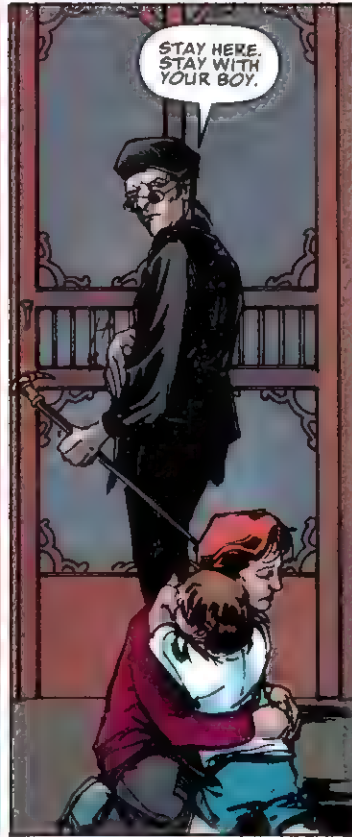
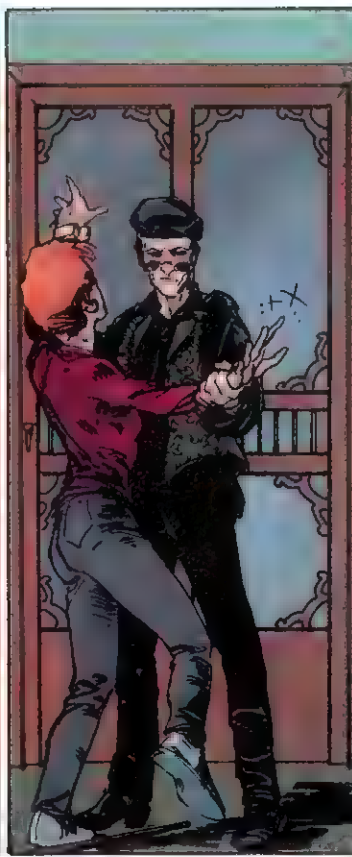
I DON'T
LET LUDLOWS
LIVE. NOT THOSE
WITH HATRED
FOR ME.

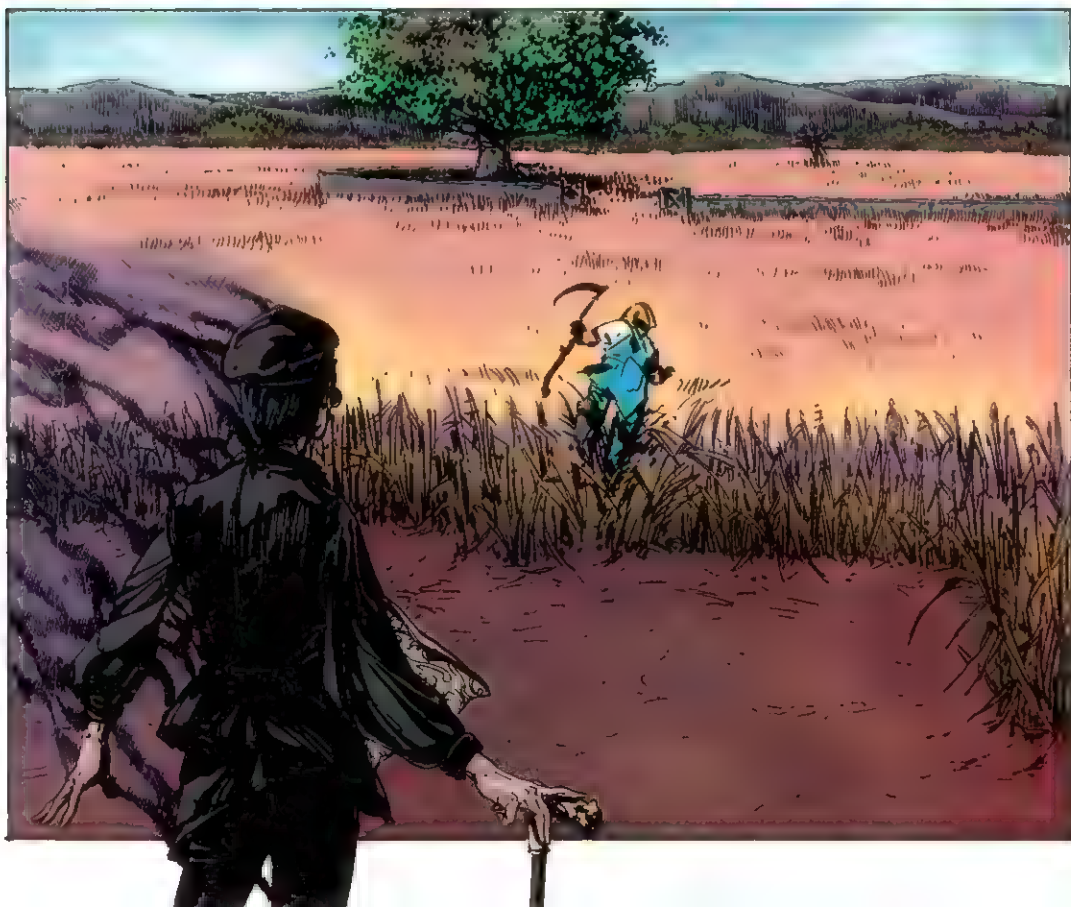
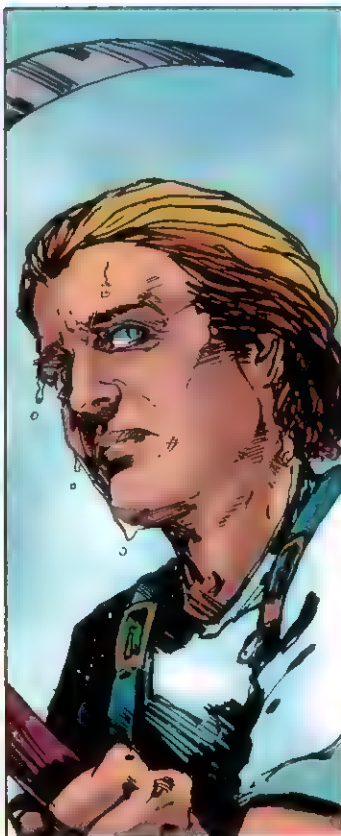


WHAT? I BROUGHT
YOU HERE, AND YOU'LL
KILL MY CRAIG ANYWAY?
WHAT KIND OF MONSTER
ARE YOU?



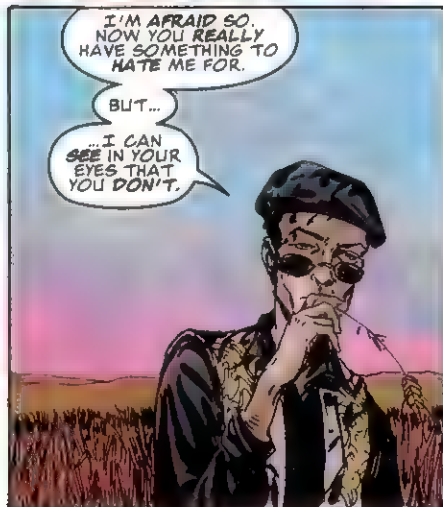
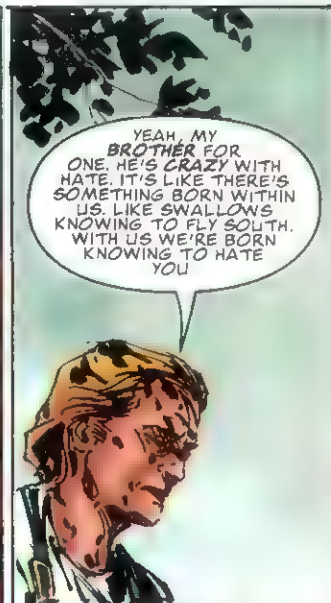
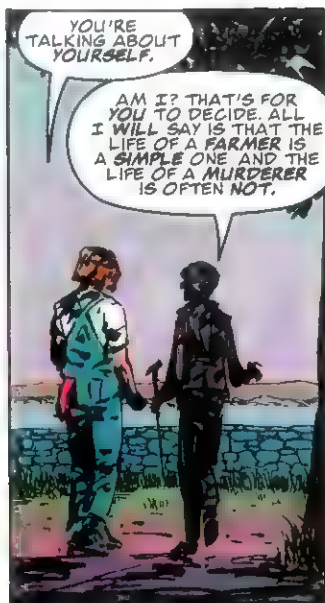
ONE WHO'S
ENDURED THE
LUDLOWS' ATTACKS
FOR A CENTURY
AND A HALF.

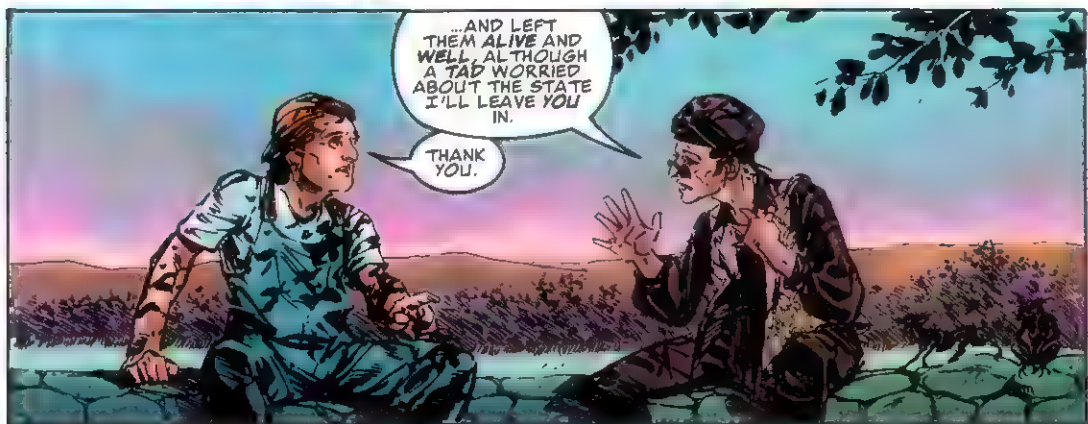
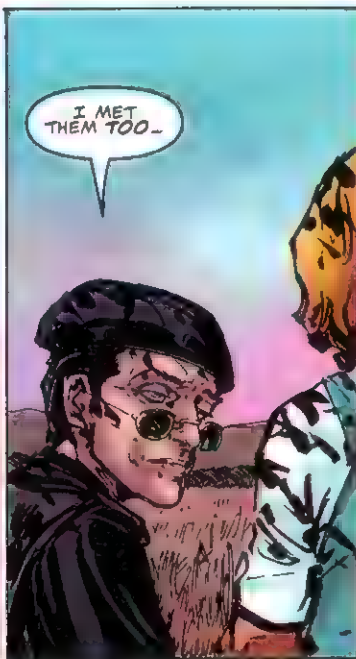









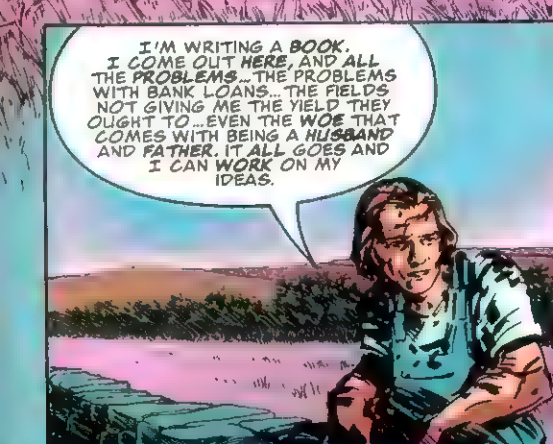






IT'S QUIET
OUT HERE. I
LIKE THAT.

SO DO I.
I LIKE TO THINK
IT'S EASY WHEN
I'M WORKING



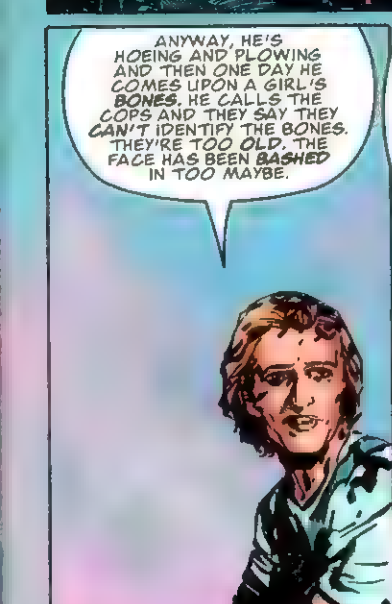
I'M WRITING A BOOK.
I COME OUT HERE, AND ALL
THE PROBLEMS... THE PROBLEMS
WITH BANK LOANS... THE FIELDS
NOT GIVING ME THE YIELD THEY
OUGHT TO... EVEN THE WOE THAT
COMES WITH BEING A HUSBAND
AND FATHER. IT ALL GOES AND
I CAN WORK ON MY
IDEAS.



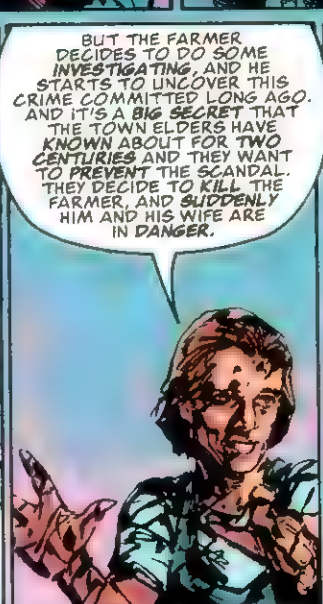
WHAT
KIND OF
BOOK?

IT'S A MYSTERY.
IT'S ABOUT A FARMER
WHO BUYS THE FIELD
OF A NEIGHBOR WHO
TOOK ILL AND DIED
TO MAKE HIS
ACREAGE BIGGER.

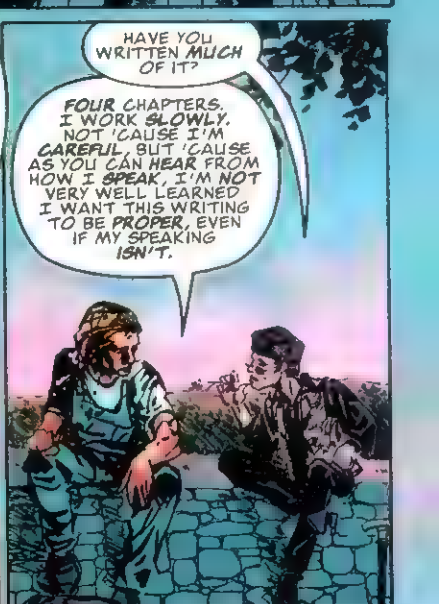
YES, I'M
WITH YOU
SO FAR



ANYWAY, HE'S
HOEING AND PLOWING
AND THEN ONE DAY HE
COMES UPON A GIRL'S
BONES. HE CALLS THE
COPS AND THEY SAY THEY
CAN'T IDENTIFY THE BONES.
THEY'RE TOO OLD. THE
FACE HAS BEEN BASHED
IN TOO MAYBE.



BUT THE FARMER
DECIDES TO DO SOME
INVESTIGATING, AND HE
STARTS TO UNCOVER THIS
CRIME COMMITTED LONG AGO.
AND IT'S A BIG SECRET THAT
THE TOWN ELDERS HAVE
KNOWN ABOUT FOR TWO
CENTURIES AND THEY WANT
TO PREVENT THE SCANDAL.
THEY DECIDE TO KILL THE
FARMER, AND SUDDENLY
HIM AND HIS WIFE ARE
IN DANGER.



HAVE YOU
WRITTEN MUCH
OF IT?

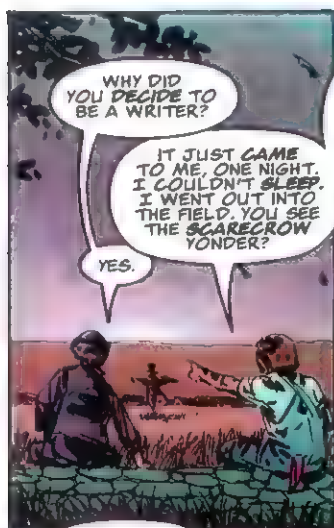
FOUR CHAPTERS.
I WORK SLOWLY.
NOT 'CAUSE I'M
CAREFUL, BUT 'CAUSE
AS YOU CAN HEAR FROM
HOW I SPEAK, I'M NOT
VERY WELL LEARNED.
I WANT THIS WRITING
TO BE PROPER, EVEN
IF MY SPEAKING
ISN'T.



I'M
IMPRESSED.

YOU'RE
CONDESCENDING.

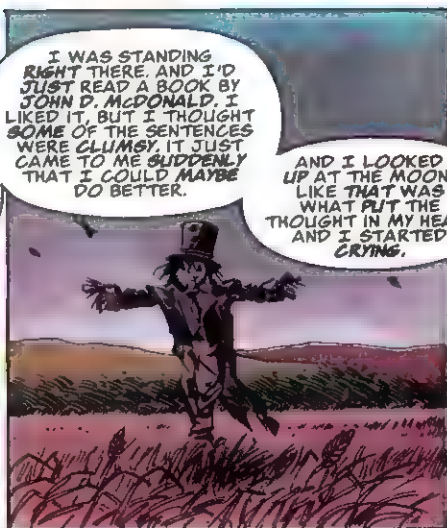
NO,
NOT AT
ALL.



WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BE A WRITER?

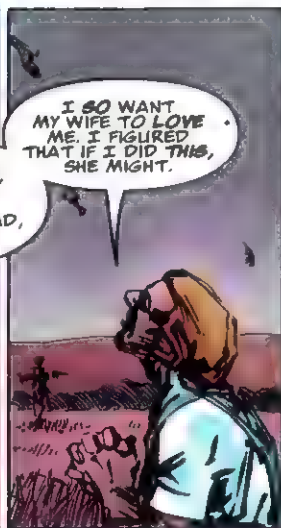
IT JUST CAME TO ME, ONE NIGHT. I COULDN'T SLEEP. I WENT OUT INTO THE FIELD. YOU SEE THE SCARECROW YONDER?

YES.

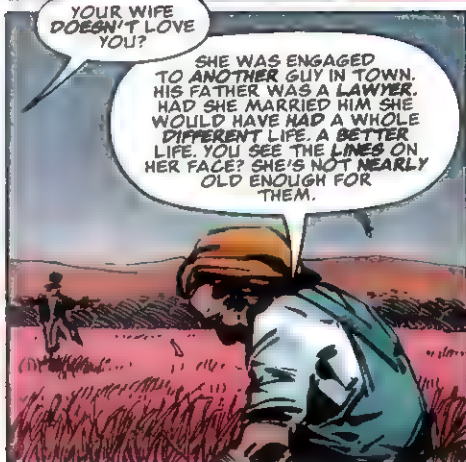


I WAS STANDING RIGHT THERE, AND I'D JUST READ A BOOK BY JOHN D. McDONALD. I LIKED IT, BUT I THOUGHT SOME OF THE SENTENCES WERE CLUMSY, IT JUST CAME TO ME SUDDENLY THAT I COULD MAYBE DO BETTER.

AND I LOOKED UP AT THE MOON, LIKE THAT WAS WHAT PUT THE THOUGHT IN MY HEAD, AND I STARTED CRYING.

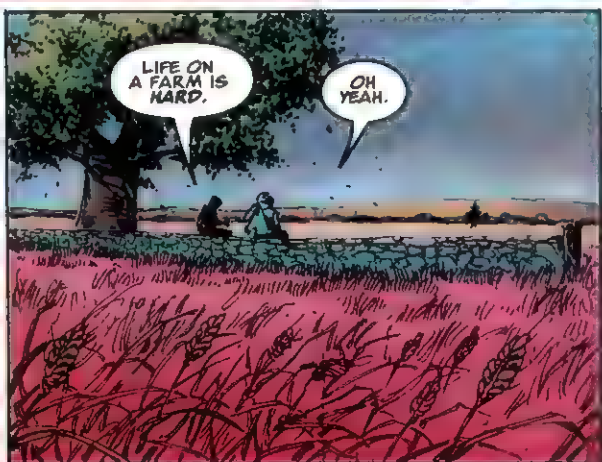


I SO WANT MY WIFE TO LOVE ME. I FIGURED THAT IF I DID THIS, SHE MIGHT.



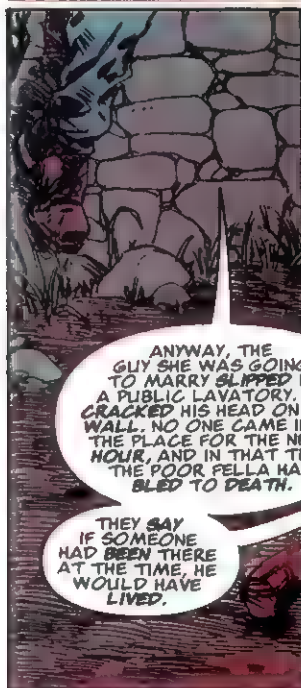
YOUR WIFE DOESN'T LOVE YOU?

SHE WAS ENGAGED TO ANOTHER GUY IN TOWN. HIS FATHER WAS A LAWYER. HAD SHE MARRIED HIM SHE WOULD HAVE HAD A WHOLE DIFFERENT LIFE. A BETTER LIFE. YOU SEE THE LINES ON HER FACE? SHE'S NOT NEARLY OLD ENOUGH FOR THEM.



LIFE ON A FARM IS HARD.

OH YEAH.

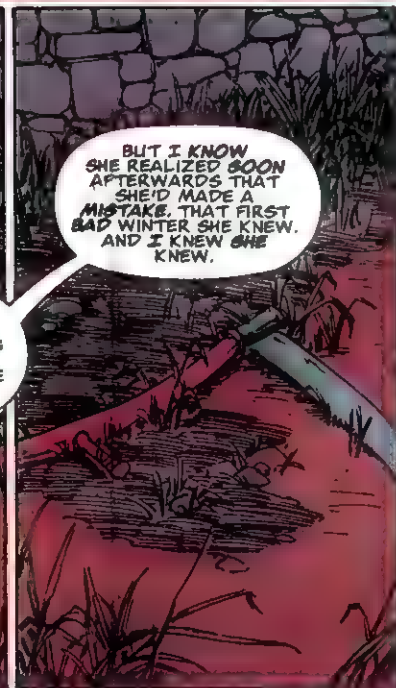


ANYWAY, THE GUY SHE WAS GOING TO MARRY SLIPPED IN A PUBLIC LAVATORY. HE CRACKED HIS HEAD ON THE WALL. NO ONE CAME INTO THE PLACE FOR THE NEXT HOUR, AND IN THAT TIME THE POOR FELLA HAD BLED TO DEATH.

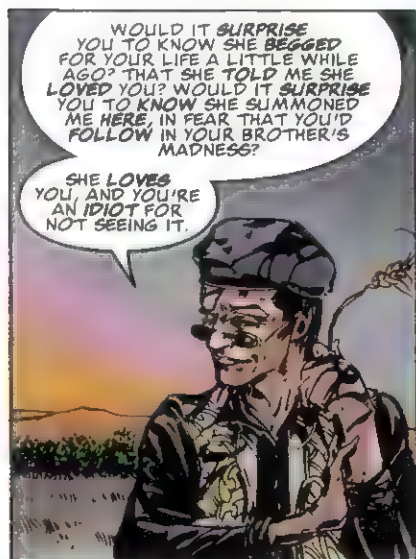
THEY SAY IF SOMEONE HAD BEEN THERE AT THE TIME, HE WOULD HAVE LIVED.



SO MY WIFE, SHE'S BROKENHEARTED. SHE BECOMES THIS BAR GIRL GOING AND DRINKING 'CAUSE SHE'S SO SAD. I'M AT BARS TOO 'CAUSE I'M LONELY, WE MEET, WE MARRY.

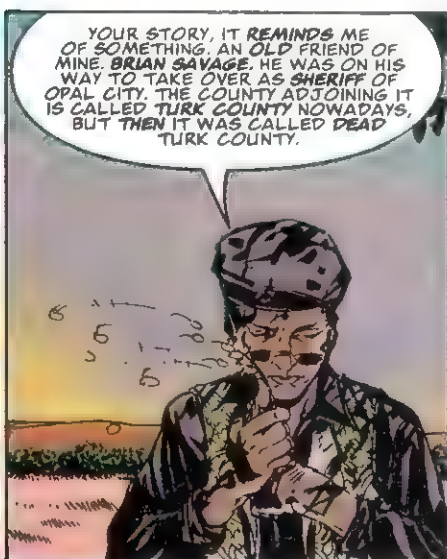


BUT I KNOW SHE REALIZED SOON AFTERWARDS THAT SHE'D MADE A MISTAKE. THAT FIRST BAD WINTER SHE KNEW. AND I KNEW SHE KNEW.

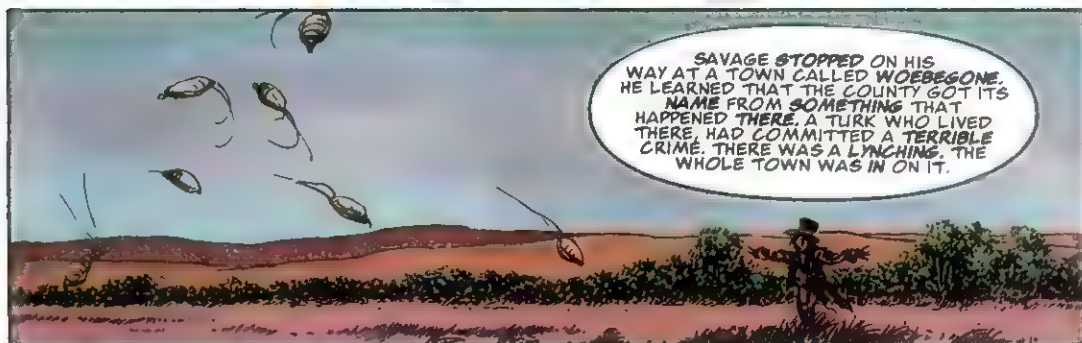


WOULD IT SURPRISE YOU TO KNOW SHE BEGGED FOR YOUR LIFE A LITTLE WHILE AGO? THAT SHE TOLD ME SHE LOVED YOU? WOULD IT SURPRISE YOU TO KNOW SHE SUMMONED ME HERE, IN FEAR THAT YOU'D FOLLOW IN YOUR BROTHER'S MADNESS?

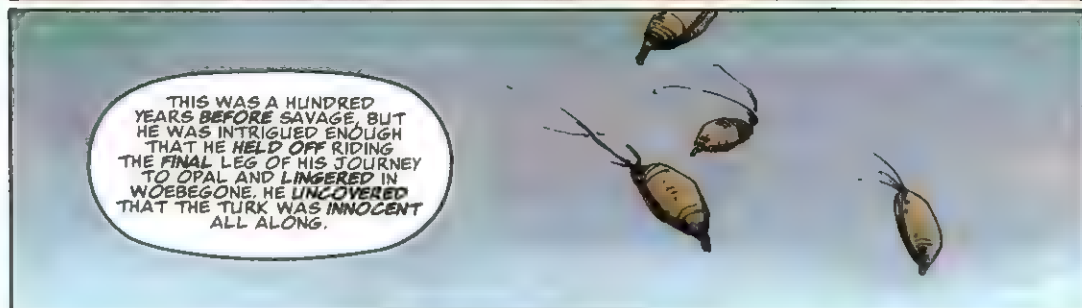
SHE LOVES YOU, AND YOU'RE AN IDIOT FOR NOT SEEING IT.



YOUR STORY, IT REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING, AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE, BRIAN SAVAGE. HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO TAKE OVER AS SHERIFF OF OPAL CITY. THE COUNTY ADJOINING IT IS CALLED TURK COUNTY NOWADAYS, BUT THEN IT WAS CALLED DEAD TURK COUNTY.



SAVAGE STOPPED ON HIS WAY AT A TOWN CALLED WOEBEGONE. HE LEARNED THAT THE COUNTY GOT ITS NAME FROM SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED THERE, A TURK WHO LIVED THERE, HAD COMMITTED A TERRIBLE CRIME. THERE WAS A LYNCHING, THE WHOLE TOWN WAS IN ON IT.



THIS WAS A HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE SAVAGE, BUT HE WAS INTRIGUED ENOUGH THAT HE HELD OFF RIDING THE FINAL LEG OF HIS JOURNEY TO OPAL AND LINGERED IN WOEBEGONE. HE UNCOVERED THAT THE TURK WAS INNOCENT ALL ALONG.



AND SUDDENLY THIS ACT THAT THE TOWN WAS PROUD OF, BECAME THEIR SHAME. THE WHOLE TOWN TRIED TO KILL SAVAGE TO SILENCE HIM.

IT'S LIKE MY STORY.



A LITTLE. I COULD SEND YOU MY NOTES ON IT...ACCORDING TO WHAT SAVAGE TOLD ME, IT MIGHT HELP YOU WITH YOUR WRITING.

OF COURSE IF WE'RE GOING TO TRY TO KILL EACH OTHER, THAT MIGHT PROVE TRICKY.



YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, SHADE. IT'S BURNING IN ME. THIS...SEED OF HATRED.

THERE'S THIS PART OF ME WANTS TO GRAB THIS SCYTHE AND COME RUNNING AT YOU



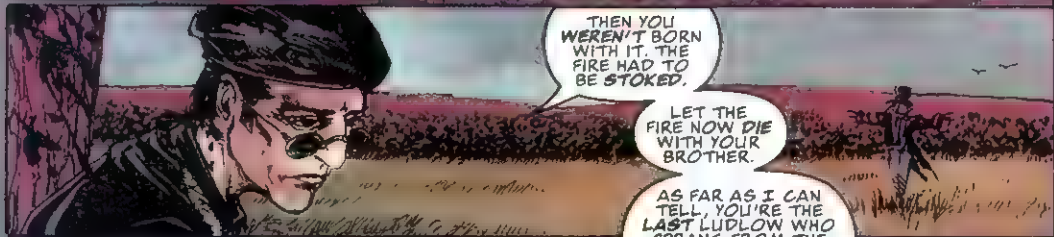
IT'S LIKE--

IT'S LIKE--



WHEN DID YOU FEEL THIS? FROM BIRTH? OR WHEN YOUR BROTHER BEGAN HIS RANTS?

ERR...I GUESS WHEN MY BROTHER STARTED

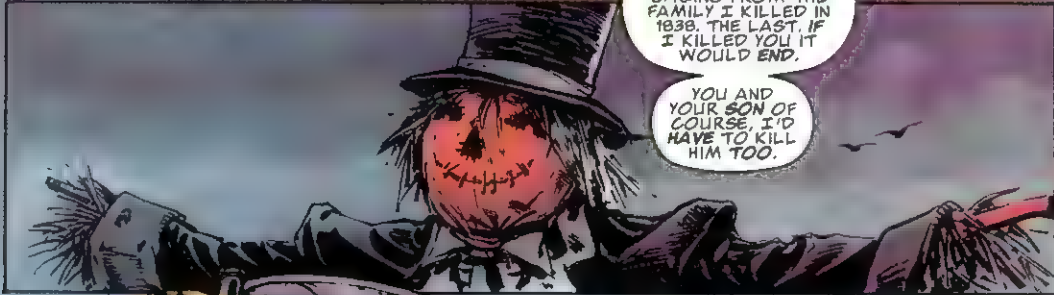


THEN YOU WEREN'T BORN WITH IT. THE FIRE HAD TO BE STOKED.

LET THE FIRE NOW DIE WITH YOUR BROTHER.

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, YOU'RE THE LAST LUDLOW WHO SPRANG FROM THE FAMILY I KILLED IN 1938. THE LAST. IF I KILLED YOU IT WOULD END.

YOU AND YOUR SON OF COURSE. I'D HAVE TO KILL HIM TOO.



YOU TALK LIKE THAT, AND I WILL COME AT YOU WITH THIS SCYTHE

I DIDN'T SAY I'D DO IT. ONLY THAT I'D HAVE TO IF I WANTED TO END YOUR LUDLOW LINE.



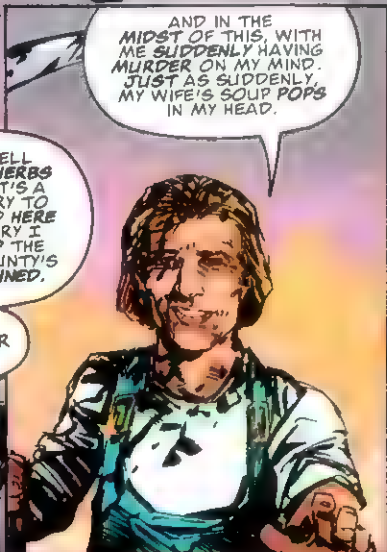
WHAT? WHY DID YOU SMILE?



I WAS JUST THINKING MY WIFE'S MUSHROOM SOUP. LIKE NOTHING YOU'VE EVER TASTED. YOU GOES OUT AT DAWN AND PICKS THE FRESH MUSHROOMS. SHE COOKS IT IN CHICKEN STOCK.

SHE WON'T TELL ANYONE WHAT HERBS SHE USES. THAT'S A BIGGER MYSTERY TO PEOPLE AROUND HERE THAN THE STORY I TOLD YOU AND THE DEAD TURK COUNTY'S SECRET COMBINED.

I LOVE HER SOUP.



AND IN THE MIST OF THIS, WITH ME SUDDENLY HAVING MURDER ON MY MIND. JUST AS SUDDENLY, MY WIFE'S SOUP POPS IN MY HEAD.



ONE OF YOUR DEAD RELATIVES... I LOVED HER WITH ALL MY HEART. I SHALL NEVER LOVE ANOTHER LIKE THAT. AND YET DESPITE LOVING ME BACK, SHE COULDN'T STOP HATING ME TOO.

WHAT WE HAD WASN'T ENOUGH TO STOP THE LUDLOW HATE THEN



BUT YOU HAVE SOMETHING I WOULD KILL TO POSSESS. YOU HAVE LOVE. YOU HAVE THIS... LIFE. YOU HAVE PEACE.

I HAVE NEVER KNOWN PEACE, SO I CAN TELL YOU THIS—IT'S RARER THAN GOLD.



AND YOU HAVE THE IDEA FOR A BOOK THAT I FOR ONE WOULD LOVE TO READ SOME DAY.

I DON'T. I DON'T KNOW.



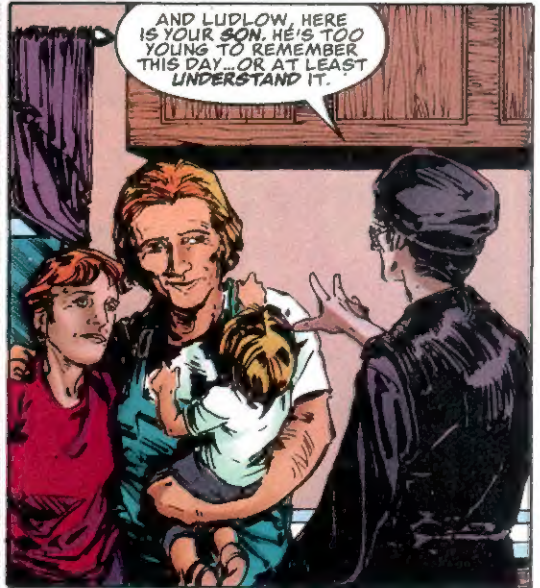
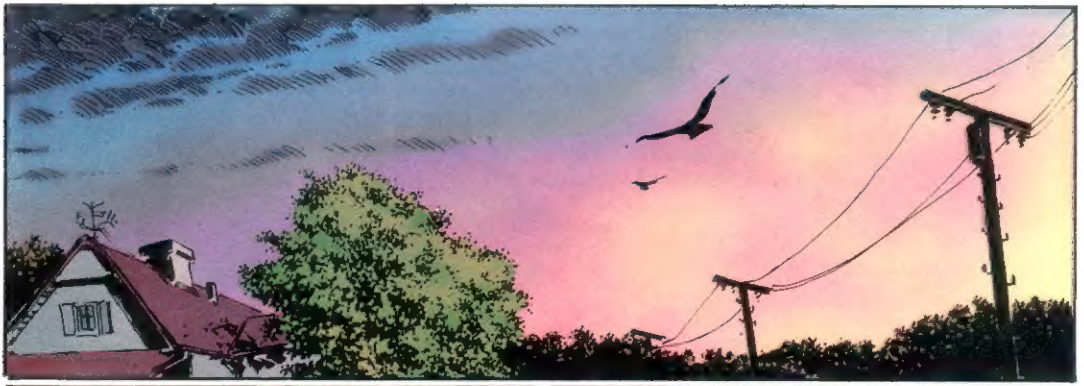
WELL THAT'S ALL I CAN SAY, LUDLOW. THAT'S EVERYTHING.




SOUP OR DEATH.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS.







*I may yet face
the wrath of Craig
Ludlow.*

*Or in a generation I'll
face his son. Or his grandson
a generation after that.*

*I hope not. I hope it's
over. That there aren't any
more Ludlows hiding in
faraway corners plotting
and hating.*

*I suppose the only
way I'll know is when
the next attack happens.
Or doesn't.*



*It's a
beautiful
evening.*

The End.

FROM THE SHADE'S JOURNAL

A voice in my head. No, behind me. I spun around. It was the Devil. He wore a fur coat.

"You are kin to me, are you not? Are you not a sprite demon? True, you are not as versed in Hell's ways, but you are darker in your practices than many who swim with glee in Hell's soupy mire."

"I am a sprite demon?" I asked. "I'm not sure I know the term, nor its meaning."

"One who is tainted with my venom." He smiled. "One who could gain entry to Hell. One who could rise and rise within the ranks of my legion."

"Oh. I see."

"Do, you? Do you indeed? Do you see how the sweet life you've had might be sweeter and fuller still in so many wonderful ways?" He paused for dramatic effect. He smiled again. "Be my agent on Earth. Be that and I will give you freedom from your chill predicament. I will give you this man you seek. I will give you warm climes and brandied drinks."

I felt snow fall upon my face. "You have many agents on Earth already, I shouldn't wonder," I said.

"I have a few."

"Some would say a few too many."

"And some might say too few. It depends what side of the fence you're sitting on."

I coughed and staggered slightly. "I've always enjoyed sitting astride that fence. He that takes sides should expect to have to take issue with another on the other side of that fence before he is done. And he who takes issue oft as not is forced to take arms. And where, then? You are dead or that other." Now it was I who paused for effect. "No, I don't take sides."

The Devil frowned. "But you are not a good man. Your acts of malice many would call worthy of me."

"I'm flattered."

"Then you'll join me."

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The wind blew across the flatland I had been traversing. With nothing to break this gale or stem it, I took the brunt of its bite. I thought of the warm place the Devil offered. I thought of my life and the wretched acts I took no small amount of pride in having perpetrated. I thought that indeed the Devil might be right in saying I was as good as doing his bidding already.

A bird flew overhead. It swirled around in lazy circles. I closed my eyes and thought of this offer made me for a moment longer before responding.

"I think I'll go alone," I said. "Thank you all the same."
"You refuse me?"

"I fear that I am already damned to inhabit your realm one day. I can wait until then to pledge my allegiance."

"By then I may not hold you in such favor."

I took a breath and looked the Devil in the eyes. "By then I may have the power to kill you and take your throne. Don't threaten me. I'll skin you and make slippers for my feet from your hide. Leave now, meek and quiet, like the day God kicked you from the clouds, and when we meet again I may not be too harsh with you."

A pause. I smile.

The Devil looked at me. He had an expression like something I'd said had hurt his feelings. I almost laughed. Instead I blinked and in that moment he was gone.

I would look back on this day. I would recall how I had threatened the Devil. I would chuckle, as only someone who has looked Satan in the eyes and lived to look at other things could. But perhaps I'd yet do as I said. If when I one day do go from this plane of existence... if I ever do... perhaps I will grab Satan by the scruff of his dirty red neck and shake him hard, and then with his loins wet from fear, I'll toss him aside and take his place downstairs.

I'm chuckling now. For I think I've a while to wait until I'll know.

Oh, and I found the Ludlow the following day. I took a good long time killing him.

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